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SUBJECT: GILCHRIST OLYMPIO: CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC
CONCERNING LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, 1.4 (b/d
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11. (C) SUMMARY: UFC leader Gilchrist Olympio told us on August 2 that he would travel to Togo within the next few days, arriving in Lome probably on August 6 or 7. He expressed cautious optimism about the legislative elections, which he believed would take place in mid-October, although he did not rule out attempts by President Faure Gnassingbe to create further postponements. He expressed concern about the management of the elections process but said that there were sufficient protective mechanisms in place that, if properly implemented, would ensure the holding of elections that he, along with the broader international community, could accept. He did not discount the likelihood of some level of fraud, but he said that Faure was under such international scrutiny that he might very well refrain from carrying out fraud or electoral sabotage on a massive scale. Olympio said that the UFC would field candidates in all of the legislative districts in the forthcoming elections. Olympio expressed optimism that the Sarkozy government would break with past traditions and take a more pragmatic and realistic posture towards Togo and the rest of Africa, and not succumb to the temptations that allowed Sarkozy's predecessors, including especially Jacques Chirac, to embrace figures such as Faure's father, Eyadema. END SUMMARY.

OVERVIEW OF ELECTORAL ISSUES

12. (C) Gilchrist Olympio, head of Togo's UFC opposition party, met with us for 90 minutes on August 2. At the start, he said that "things are going relatively well" with respect to the legislative elections in Togo. Olympio said that there were certainly many potential pitfalls and the possibility that President Faure Gnassingbe might take steps to ensure victory for his side, but that he (Olympio) was "cautiously optimistic." Olympio described problems with voter identification/registration kits, which were insufficient in number, with an inadequate number of technicians to operate them. He said, however, that voter identification and registration seemed to be proceeding, albeit slowly.

13. (C) Olympio thought that elections were most likely to be held during the mid-October period. He was well aware of the constitutional requirement to hold legislative elections at least 30 days before the expiration of the current legislature's mandate (which would require elections in September), but he said that the date would have to slip in order to accommodate the actual situation in Togo with respect to voter registration and the like. He indicated that he was comfortable with the October date. As he did at several points during the conversation, he noted that Faure could "always try something" to delay the elections further, but he felt confident that they would take place more or less

as planned.

PERSONAL ENGAGEMENT

14. (C) Olympio said that he had been in Togo two weeks previously and had traveled across the country to deliver his political message, and had been well received wherever he went. Most notably, he said that the Faure regime did nothing to impede or hamper his activities. The government provided a three-man security force to escort and protect him, and that the team treated him courteously, shared meals with him, and were most helpful with crowd control. He believed that members of his security detail shared some of his political views, although they refrained from saying so.

15. (C) Olympio said he planned to return to Togo within the next few days, arriving in Lome on August 6 or 7. He said he expected to continue his political activities. Based on his most recent experience, he said he did expect that the regime would hassle him or his associates.

16. (C) The UFC, Olympio continued, would be fully engaged in the elections and would field candidates in every electoral district. He said that the UFC had been faced with a choice -- either participate or allow the government to dominate the results. Olympio expressed confidence that the UFC would do well, assuming the elections were conducted in a reasonably fair manner.

ELECTORAL CONTROLS

17. (C) Olympio explained that much of his confidence was based on the system of controls over the electoral process and the likelihood that, absent an outright attempt to fix the elections on Faure's part, they would ensure reasonably

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acceptable results. He noted the provisions for government, opposition, and neutral observers at all key points in the process, from voting, the initial counting of votes at polling sites, the compiling of results at the regional level, and the final tallying of votes at the national level.

He said that the EU, among others, had expressed an intention to send observers, and he thanked the USG for its contribution to the electoral process. Olympio said that he would welcome as well the presence of NGO observers, such as those from former President Carter's organization, and he hoped that they would offer to participate.

18. (C) Although always wary that Faure could try to pull a fast one, Olympio said that Faure was under intense international scrutiny and that he would not likely act too far out of line. There would be some level of fraud, for sure, but Olympio doubted that Faure would have the audacity to "steal" the election or provoke violence, as had been the case during the 2005 poll.

FRANCE

19. (C) Olympio said that he hoped that the Sarkozy government's arrival signaled a new and important chapter in France's relations with Africa. He noted with disdain the way that Sarkozy's predecessors, including especially Chirac, had made a habit of embracing Africa's unsavory leaders, such as Eyadema Gnassingbe, Bokassa, and others of their ilk. Olympio understood that there would always be elements among the French political class that would pressure Sarkozy and other French leaders to continue the old, paternalistic, and mutually self-serving "francafrique" ways of the past, but he sensed that Sarkozy would adopt a more pragmatic, transparent, and realistic policy. All Africans would welcome such an approach, Olympio said.

COMMENT

110. (C) Olympio was markedly more relaxed and appeared much

less stressed than he had on previous occasions. He indulged in fewer long-winded digressions, although he did launch into one or two fierce anti-Gnassingbe diatribes and continued to refer to Faure variously as "le garçon," "the boy," "le fils," and "le petit." In overall terms, Olympio gave the impression that he believed that maybe, just maybe, Faure had been put in a position where he could not dare sabotage the upcoming elections and that finally Olympio and the opposition would be in a position to achieve some measure of victory. END COMMENT.

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